USPTO COVID-19 Relief Efforts

Kery A. Fries, Senior Legal Advisor, Office of Patent Legal Administration

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Agenda

- Deadline Waivers and Other Relief
- Relief to Restore Priority or Benefit Rights
- Waiver of Certain Fees
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- Relief for Delays in Filing Certified Copies of Foreign Priority Applications
- Platform to Facilitate Connections Between Patent Holders and Potential Licensees in Key Technologies
- Waiver of Original Handwritten Signature Requirement and Relief for Plant Patent Applicants
- COVID-19 Prioritized Examination Pilot
Deadline Waivers and Other Relief

- The USPTO issued three notices regarding waiver of timing deadlines. The notices were issued March 31, 2020, April 28, 2020, and May 27, 2020. The notices permitted affected applicants to extend due dates for certain filings, if the response or fee was accompanied by a statement that the delay was due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The USPTO provided relief in the form of a waiver of the petition fee for the revival of patent applications (and reexamination proceedings) that became abandoned (or terminated or limited) as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Such petitions had to be filed by July 31, 2020.
- The USPTO provided a 30-day extension of time of an original due date (between and inclusive of March 27, 2020 and April 30, 2020) for certain patent owner responses in a trial proceeding before the Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB).
Relief to Restore Priority or Benefit Rights for Patent Applicants

• On June 12, 2020, the USPTO extended the time period for petition to restore certain rights of priority or benefit in a patent application and waived the associated petition fee.

• The relief extended the two-month time-period for restoring the right of priority to or benefit of a foreign or provisional application for any nonprovisional application due to be filed after March 27, 2020, but on or before July 30, 2020.
Waiver of Certain Fees

• On June 29, 2020, the USPTO extended to September 30, 2020, the time for small and micro entities to pay certain patent-related fees that would otherwise have been due on or after March 27, 2020.
  – The small or micro entity fees eligible for an extension included basic filing fees, basic national fees, issue fees, and maintenance fees.
Deferred-fee provisional patent applications program

• On September 16, 2020, the USPTO announced the deferred-fee provisional patent application pilot program.

• Applicants may request deferred payment of the provisional application filing fee until the filing of a corresponding nonprovisional application.

• In turn, applicants must agree that the technical subject matter disclosed in their provisional applications will be made available to the public via a searchable collaboration database maintained on the USPTO’s website.
  – Provisional applications are generally maintained in confidence per 35 U.S.C. 122(a).
  – Required program form PTO/SB/452 includes applicant’s waiver of this confidentiality provision.
Subject matter eligible for the deferred-fee program

• The subject matter disclosed in the provisional application must concern a product or process related to COVID-19.

• The product or process must be subject to an applicable Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for COVID-19 use. It is acceptable if the approval
  – has been obtained,
  – is pending, or
  – will be sought prior to marketing.

• The FDA approval requirement is the same for both the deferred-fee program and the COVID-19 prioritized examination program.
Duration of the deferred-fee program

• The deferred-fee program will accept certifications and requests for participation for a period of 12 months, beginning on September 17, 2020.

• The USPTO may extend the pilot program (with or without modifications) or terminate it depending on the workload and resources needed to administer it, feedback from the public, and its effectiveness.

• Depending on feedback and public interest, the technological scope could also be expanded beyond COVID–19 to other areas that are the focus of pioneering or rapid innovation.
**View of deferred-fee program database**

*Columns for assignee and contact information not shown.*

https://foiadocuments.uspto.gov/provisionalapplication/

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Prior art considerations

- A submission under the program will result in a public disclosure of the technical subject matter and may be citable as prior art under 35 U.S.C. 102(a)(1) as of the date it is added to the database. However, the USPTO does not consider this public disclosure to constitute publication of a patent application under 35 U.S.C. 122(b) because provisional patent applications are not published; see 35 U.S.C. 122(b)(2)(A)(iii).

- A provisional patent application submitted under the program may become prior art under 35 U.S.C. 102(a)(2) as of its filing date, but only if there has been a proper benefit claim under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) in a later-filed nonprovisional application or international application and the later-filed application has been published or deemed published under 35 U.S.C. 122(b) or has issued as a U.S. patent.
Prior art considerations, continued

• A publication in the collaboration database cannot be used against the inventor’s own corresponding later-filed nonprovisional application in the United States, provided that the later-filed application is filed within one year of the publication; see 35 U.S.C. 102(b)(1)(A).

• However, applicants should be aware that some foreign jurisdictions treat an inventor’s public disclosure made within one year of filing as prior art against the inventor’s own application unless that earlier disclosure is the subject of a proper priority claim in that jurisdiction.
Relief for Delays in Filing Certified Copies of Foreign Priority Applications

• Some foreign IP offices are not currently issuing paper certified copies of foreign applications due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
• On February 1, 2021, the USPTO announced relief under certain conditions to suspend the requirement for a paper certified copy of a foreign application when the foreign application was filed in a foreign IP office that does not participate in a bilateral or multilateral priority document exchange program with the USPTO.
• If the USPTO grants a request to suspend the certified copy submission requirement, the USPTO will proceed to issue the patent with the foreign priority claim on the front page of the patent.
Relief for Delays in Filing Certified Copies of Foreign Priority Applications, continued

• Once the foreign IP office resumes processing requests for paper certified copies, the patentee must:
  – Comply with the foreign IP office’s requirements for obtaining a paper certified copy (which may include submitting a new request for a paper copy) within two months after the date the foreign IP office resumes processing requests for paper certified copies, and
  – Submit a paper certified copy to the USPTO within one month after the date the paper certified copy is issued from the foreign IP office.

• The paper certified copy does not need to be accompanied by a petition for delayed submission of a certified copy if filed within the time period identified above.
Platform to Facilitate Connections Between Patent Holds and Potential Licensees in Key Technologies

• The USPTO unveiled a new web-based intellectual property (IP) marketplace platform, Patents 4 Partnerships, to provide the public with a user-friendly, searchable repository of patent and published patent applications related to the COVID-19 pandemic that are indicated as available for licensing.
  – https://developer.uspto.gov/ipmarketplace/search/patents

• The platform facilitates voluntary licensing and commercialization of innovations in a variety of key technologies, and helps disseminate valuable patent information by helping to bring to marketplace new products and technologies for the prevention, treatment, and diagnosis of COVID-19.
Waiver of Original Handwritten Signature Requirement and Relief for Plant Patent Applicants

• The USPTO *sua sponte* waived the requirements for an original handwritten signature personally signed in permanent dark ink or equivalent for correspondence requiring a person’s signature relating to:
  – Registration to practice before the USPTO in patent cases, enrollment and disciplinary investigations, and disciplinary proceedings
  – Payments by credit cards where the payment is not being made via the USPTO’s electronic filing systems

• The USPTO is temporarily permitting the filing of plant patent applications and follow-on documents via the USPTO patent electronic filing systems until further notice.
COVID-19 Prioritized Examination Pilot Program
COVID-19 Prioritized Examination Program

• The USPTO considers the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak to be an “extraordinary situation,” such that fees not required by statute may be waived.

• Accordingly, the USPTO is accepting requests for prioritized examination for applications that claim a product or process related to COVID–19 without the additional fee.

• The USPTO’s goal is to provide a final disposition within six months of prioritized status being granted if applicants respond within 30 days to a notice from the USPTO.
COVID-19 Prioritized Examination Pilot
Program Requirements

• Same requirements as Prioritized Examination (Track 1) except:
  – The prioritized examination fee is waived.
  – Open to small and micro entities only.
  – The application must be a non-continuing nonprovisional application or a continuing application claiming the benefit of one nonprovisional application or one prior international application designating the United States.
  – Applicants must certify claim(s) of the application must cover a product or process subject to an applicable FDA approval for COVID–19 use.
  – The request must include an Application Data Sheet (ADS).
COVID-19 Prioritized Examination Pilot
“FDA Certification”

- Applicants must certify their applications claim products or processes that are subject to an applicable FDA approval, which may include, but are not limited to: an Investigational New Drug (IND) application, an Investigational Device Exemption (IDE), a New Drug Application (NDA), a Biologics License Application (BLA), a Premarket Approval (PMA), or an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

- “Subject to . . . approval” does not mean approval has already been sought or granted, but rather that the product or process covered by the claim is subject to the FDA’s jurisdiction before it can be marketed for use in prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of COVID-19.
Requesting prioritized examination under the pilot

• Applicants are encouraged to submit form PTO/SB/450.
• Form PTO/SB/450 contains the necessary certifications for qualification to participate in the pilot.
• Use of form PTO/SB/450 will also enable the USPTO to quickly identify and timely process the request.
Duration of the COVID-19 prioritized examination

• Until 500 requests are accepted:
  – As of June 8, 2021: 678 filed / 418 granted / 82 available

• The USPTO may extend, modify, or terminate the program depending on the workload and resources needed to administer the program, feedback from the public, and the effectiveness of the program.

• Comments may be addressed to: Covid19PrioritizedExamPilot@uspto.gov.

• More information available at: https://www.uspto.gov/initiatives/covid-19-prioritized-examination-pilot
Thank you!

www.uspto.gov